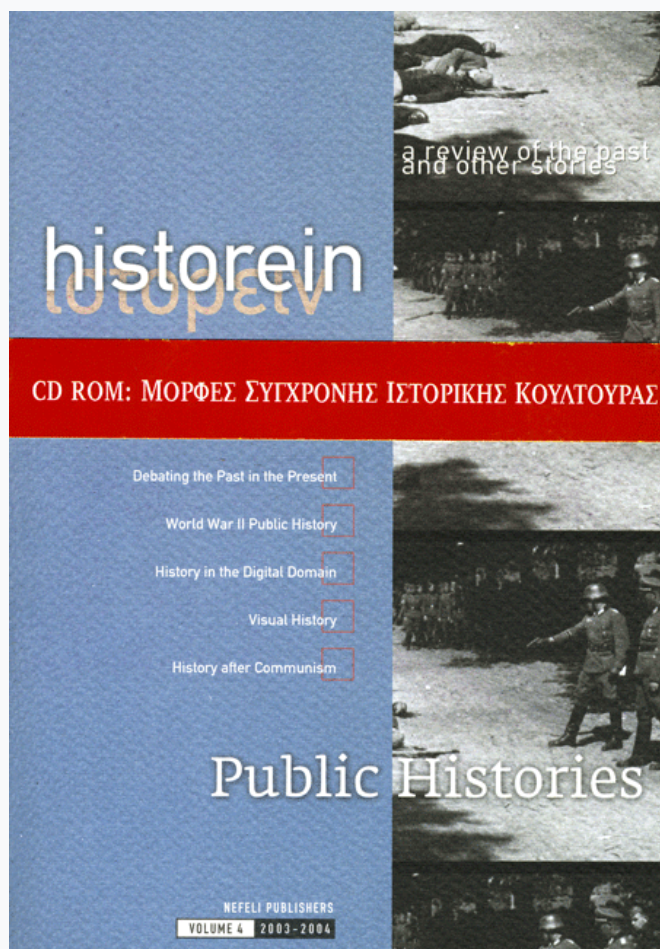


## Historein

Vol 4 (2003)

Public Histories



### The Politics of History and the History of Politics: The Rewriting of the Past During Perestroika (1985-1990)

*Hara Kouki*

doi: [10.12681/historein.85](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.85)

Copyright © 2012, Hara Kouki



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Kouki, H. (2004). The Politics of History and the History of Politics: The Rewriting of the Past During Perestroika (1985-1990). *Historein*, 4, 131-160. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.85>

# *The Politics of History and the History of Politics: the Rewriting of the Past During Perestroika (1985-1990)*

**Hara Kouki**

## *Introduction*

On 13 March 1988, a letter signed by Nina Andreeva, a Leningrad teacher, appeared in the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia* saying:

There is no limit to the range of subjects for discussion. A multiparty system, free emigration, freedom of religious propaganda, the right to discuss sexual problems in the press, the need to decentralize cultural administration, abolition of military service, and more. But most often the disputes revolve around our country's past.<sup>1</sup>

This letter, devoted to a wide range of problems connected with *perestroika*, gave rise to a vociferous conservative reaction against the overall policies concerning the current political reform of the Soviet political system. The most essential feature of this radical assault was denunciation of the new vision of the past that Gorbachev had inaugurated and which "falsified the history of socialism."<sup>2</sup> Political debates and everyday life seemed to revolve around the past, for *glasnost* had indeed launched a retrospective openness that was inseparably associated with actual reforms and resulted in all-consuming official and public interest in the restructuring of history. Although the driving force of this historical *glasnost* in 1987 appeared to be de-Stalinization, the terms of discourse on the Soviet past soon became so uncontrolled and extended that it even embraced anti-Leninist positions. In March 1990, Article 6 was removed from the Soviet Constitution and the monopoly of the Communist Party established in 1917 by Lenin abolished.

Although historical *glasnost* in itself was politically unsettling, it was one of several factors – the acute socio-economic crisis, the devastating

nationalist upheaval in the USSR, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe – working in the same direction whose combined effect led to the erosion of support for the regime. The present essay intends to focus specifically on the phenomenon of this rediscovery of the past in the USSR under Gorbachev; the first section surveys how this “obsession” with history surfaced and affected Soviet society, highlighting some of its most characteristic manifestations in politics, journalism, and academics. The second section seeks to reveal the rationale of this historical revisionism by examining the specific causes behind its emergence, and the last section raises the question, “What if *perestroika* had not been launched?” with the aim of understanding if this rewriting of history was dependent entirely upon Gorbachev’s policies. This paper is not concerned with an in-depth survey of the diverse accounts of the Soviet past expressed during this period, but will instead concentrate on the process that led to such a reshaping of history, a phenomenon that was itself increasingly transformed into a powerful motor for reform.

This was not the first time that Soviet society experienced this kind of reinterpretation of its history. Khrushchev, in his so-called “Secret Speech”<sup>3</sup> at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, condemned the “personality cult,” repressions, and purges of the 1930s, as well as rehabilitated several party members. That was the starting point of an anti-Stalinist campaign interlinked with political reforms that lasted until 1964 and brought about a period of “thaw” in Soviet life.<sup>4</sup> Khrushchev, however, made no effort to criticize anyone but Stalin (and a few NKVD men) and attempted to picture the Communist Party as the main victim of this age of “terror”. As a result, this decade witnessed a particularly selective and politically instrumental assessment of past errors, accompanied by very few social changes because public fear of open discussion did not diminish and “people remained silent.”<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, Gorbachev’s reformist *perestroika* (restructuring program) launched in July 1986<sup>6</sup> along with *glasnost* (openness), was proclaimed to be a revolution within a revolution “in the minds and the hearts of people.”<sup>7</sup> Reconsideration of Soviet history and especially of Stalinism resurfaced, hand in hand with the leadership’s attempt to reform the Soviet bureaucratic command economy. It was, consequently, vulnerable to political moves, but, nonetheless, this time the rethinking of history became devastatingly intense and progressively freed itself from the politburo’s agenda.

## *A. How Was History Rewritten Under Gorbachev?*

### **1. Official History Until 1988**

When he came to power Gorbachev seemed reluctant to interfere with long-established patterns, praising past policies and referring simply to “mistakes” that “had not been avoided.”<sup>8</sup> He soon realized, however, that debating the past was more a prerequisite for his reforms than an impediment, so he changed his position. In February of 1987 the Soviet leader declared that “there should not be any blank spots in our history”<sup>9</sup> and during that year made frequent public state-

ments about the past that, while praising the Leninist heritage, were mildly disapproving of Stalinist policies.<sup>10</sup> The interrelation between history and *perestroika* was increasingly accentuated (“attention to our history... is urgently necessary for our present work”<sup>11</sup>) and the boundaries of permissible historical discussion were gradually extended. Gorbachev’s speech marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution sounded like a compromise, since he balanced criticism with appraisal of the past, but nonetheless he condemned the Stalinist system with unprecedented intensity and ascribed the country’s past a central role.<sup>12</sup> The same applies to his book *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* recapitulating the official version of history: “Yes, industrialization and collectivization were indispensable... but the methods applied were not always accord with socialist principles.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the reassessment of the Soviet Past was the most contentious issue at the XIX Party Conference,<sup>14</sup> at which Gorbachev, defending *glasnost*, declared, “it is our political and moral duty to restore justice to the victims of lawlessness” and even proposed the erection of a related monument in Moscow.<sup>15</sup> Albeit with caution, “nowhere else in the world has a government argued about its own history as frequently and intensively as did the politburo”<sup>16</sup> throughout this first phase of *perestroika*.<sup>17</sup>

The official policy towards the Soviet past during this period was not confined to formal statements. The leadership was also trying to open up the past through a balanced policy of rehabilitations.<sup>18</sup> Initiated by the rehabilitation of a few NEP (New Economic Policy) economists in July 1987, this process culminated in the rehabilitation of Bukharin in 1988. Moreover, the Council for Toponymy undertook the task of renaming streets, squares, districts, and cities, while prominent figures in Soviet history were discredited and relevant statues removed.<sup>19</sup> Gorbachev’s *glasnost* verbally and symbolically reassessed the past, trying to regulate and orchestrate historical revisionism.

Professional historians, however, did not abandon the old conservative formulas of their scholarship until 1988, because they were “psychologically and professionally unprepared.”<sup>20</sup> There was, however, a “serious gap between the interest of Soviet people in history... and the ability of historians to satisfy that interest.”<sup>21</sup> Yuri Afanasiev, appointed rector of the State Historical Archive Institute in late 1986, played the role of the catalyst. His provocative and radical thinking about Soviet history as a “bombastic pomposity” portrayed “one-sidedly”<sup>22</sup> triggered some debates and roundtable discussions in historical journals.<sup>23</sup> The teaching of history, however, was in great disarray, as interest mixed with confusion among the students (“we are taught blindly to repeat obsolete views of reality...”<sup>24</sup>) caused tension in schools, culminating in cancellation of the annual history exams in 1988.<sup>25</sup>

Up to the spring of 1988 the official line towards historical reassessment could be summed up in the cliché, “Triumph and Tragedy.”<sup>26</sup> “History has to be seen as it is; there was everything, there were mistakes, it was hard, but the country moved forward,”<sup>27</sup> observed Gorbachev in 1987, implying that the Stalinist “administrative-command system was a tragic aberration that distorted the triumphant path of socialist construction,”<sup>28</sup> an argument seen in several other

publications as well.<sup>29</sup> Numerous debates emerged about the possible alternative paths of development, and in 1988 Bukharin came to embody humanistic socialism. This denunciation of Stalinist central control opened the way to promoting the Leninist NEP as a viable path for accomplishing socialism. Afanasiev's comments are enlightening on this point: "Let us remember that Stalin abolished the NEP... turned blood and fear into foundations of the state... Despite vast sacrifices we did not achieve socialism in the form Lenin envisaged in the twenties..."<sup>30</sup> Yuri Afanasiev seems, therefore, to epitomize *perestroika*. Aligned with the regime in the past, he was now accurately and radically criticizing it, pushing forward the prevalent trend of historical revisionism: "We should abandon our dogmatic historical materialism, which presents the whole path since October as a straight-line process, governed by a priori predetermined laws. There were and always are some choices. *Perestroika* is an alternative to Stalinism, stagnation, corruption, it ensures free, democratic choice... here are combined history and politics, past and present..."<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Public Response Until 1988

Between 1986 and 1988 politicians and historians were, in fact, trying to catch up with the overwhelming public turmoil about the past that was driven by outspoken exponents of *publitsisty*, that is to say, interpreters of history in cinema, literature, journals, and theatre. "Writers have long since overtaken historians in posing sharp questions," admitted A. Poliakov.<sup>32</sup> The flood of novels, poems, films (currently produced or previously banned), television programs, and feature articles concerning Soviet history attracted the attention of millions of Soviet citizens.

Anatolii Rybakov's *Detii Arbat* (Children of Arbat), published in 1987, portrays the reality of the purges during the 30s, while *Novoe naznachenie* (New Appointment) by Alexandr Beck penetrates the personality cult through the eyes of an industrial bureaucrat. The Tengiz Abuladze film, *Pokayanie* (Repentance), unmaskes the burden of guilt, silence, and memory borne from the Stalinist years to the present day, and the Mikhail Shatrov play, *Dalshe... Dalshe... Dalshe* (Onward) examines the entire history of the Soviet regime through a chain of discussions between historical figures. Anna Akhmatova's *Rekviem* and *The Heirs of Stalin* by Yevgenii Yevtushenko, poems previously denounced, were now available to the public.<sup>33</sup>

These works enjoyed enormous popularity, to the extent that, for example, crowds waited for hours to see special showings of *Repentance*, a film that ended up symbolizing the era of *glasnost* for Soviet citizens.<sup>34</sup> The manifold public reactions to these cultural products provided the main impetus for discussion about Stalinism and, consequently, triggered intense reevaluations of historical subjects. Two of the most significant articles written on Stalinism and its origins were responses to such artistic events,<sup>35</sup> and a tide of comments from viewers/readers inundated the press every day – *Znamya* devoted 18 pages to letters from readers commenting about *Dalshe*.<sup>36</sup> The debates were intense and all-consuming, and frequently appeared in journals in the form of roundtable discussions.<sup>37</sup>

All this turmoil in Soviet society during *glasnost* following the relaxation of censorship during 1987 was reflected in and further stimulated by the press. Literary and popular journals, such as *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Novyi Mir*, and *Ogonek*, with their newly-appointed reformist editors, played an essential role in recovering and debating the past. In addition, *Pravda*, *Voprosy Istorii*, and *Voprosy Istorii KPSS* also published revisionist historical articles to satisfy the need for new information and viewpoints. The literary monthlies, in which novels and poems previously banned were now published, circulated in hundreds of thousands of copies, yet people stood in queues from early in the morning for these publications, and there often were not enough copies.<sup>38</sup> Between 1985 and 1988 the production of journals and newspapers increased by 23 million copies,<sup>39</sup> all of which regularly contained historical articles. The press thrived on revelations about the past, testimonies, and memoirs from repressed citizens,<sup>40</sup> as well as correspondence from citizens trying to come to terms with their memories. Journalists continuously pushed the boundaries of *glasnost* even further to provide for their insatiable readers, who, for example, sent hundreds of thousands of letters to *Ogonek*'s letters column<sup>41</sup> relating personal or family stories to historical revisionist debates.

This gradual radicalization of historical consciousness during *perestroika*, in addition to being revealed in the products of *publitsisty* and hesitantly facilitated from above, began to manifest itself in other realms, as well. The so-called *neformaly*, "informal groups," officially sanctioned independent clubs that had surfaced in large numbers after 1986, took up the issue of de-Stalinization in seminars and "discussion clubs."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, demonstrations were held in commemoration of repressions and groups of people tried to compile *Kniga Pamiati* (Memory Books)<sup>43</sup> based on lists of victims of the purges. Small excavation teams were set up by citizens to uncover mass graves<sup>44</sup> and unofficial publications (former *samizdat*) kept on circulating as a platform for radical views about the Soviet past.<sup>45</sup> In these many ways the Soviet people, with exhilaration and shame, participated in the uncovering Gorbachev had launched of suppressed memories.

This fervent process is eloquently embodied in the organization and activities of the Memorial Society, founded in 1987 by a group of young, unknown scholars with the original aim of collecting signatures in support of erecting a monument to the victims of terror. Soon after it was founded, the society, while gradually expanding in the provinces<sup>46</sup> and considerably increasing its membership,<sup>47</sup> broadened its goals to embrace an overall memorial project by discovering and revealing the historical truth of Stalinism. Memorial Society activists "collected documents and memoirs, transcribed oral testimonies, and undertook expeditions to the sites of camps and deportation" with the aid of "tens of thousands of people."<sup>48</sup> In November 1988 the first public exhibition about the Gulag was organized, called "The Week of Conscience;"<sup>49</sup> thousands of people participated by "exposing" their experiences in the event. The Memorial Society orchestrated demonstrations and conferences, as well as provided material, legal, and medical help for survivors, thereby acquiring the nature of a massive civil rights movement,<sup>50</sup> always seeking to mobilize the public in favor of an anti-Stalinist agenda.



This social upheaval about the past dominated Soviet public life with increased intensity throughout these years, gradually radicalizing a society silent for so long. All these voices about the past that came to the fore also were joined by people who objected to this “constant negativism,” saying that “we must not see in our history only misuses”<sup>51</sup> or by more conservative forces that considered this new trend was “abusing and spitting upon our history and past.”<sup>52</sup> Historical *glasnost* had generated an enormous amount of information in an extremely short period of time, had unleashed voices and private memories, as well as opposition to its policies; it was, thereby, molding civil society. Although he supported the “socialist pluralism” of opinions and approved criticism of the past, Gorbachev seemed quite perturbed at the extent and vehemence of this nascent public movement, as evidenced by the politburo’s ambivalent attitude toward the Memorial Society.<sup>53</sup>

### 3. 1988-90: Historians to the Fore

In the spring of 1988 (when the implementation phase of *perestroika* began<sup>54</sup>), however, professional historians began to get substantially involved in this debate and altered its course. Until then, public attention was focussed on repudiation of the Stalinist system, revelation of the numbers of the victims,<sup>55</sup> and exposure of unknown facts about World War II. The historians managed to catch up and even overtake these concerns. Lenin was pictured almost as a “Bolshevik Christ”<sup>56</sup> when Vasily Seliunin linked Stalinism with Lenin himself<sup>57</sup> and, even more alarmingly, when Aleksandr Tsipko, in a series of four articles, located the sources of Stalinism in Marxism-Leninism. These works were catalysts for scholars, who started debating whether the Stalinist period was an aberration in the course of socialism or the inevitable outcome of utopian ideas. Hence, in 1988, the terms of historical discourse were significantly modified, as is evident in Tsipko’s arguments: “In all cases without exceptions... the struggle against the market and commodity-money relations had always led to authoritarianism, to the disruption of the rights and virtues of personality, to the omnipotence of administration and bureaucratic apparatus... Such messianism and deification of any kind of great idea is more than a weakness and a romantic notion, it’s a great sin against humanity and one’s own people.”<sup>58</sup>

The attack on Marxism-Leninism grew stronger in the course of 1989 and 1990, particularly as it was addressed to a society that was just opening up, and hastily. Several publications by historians assessed Lenin’s and the NEP’s responsibilities in depth and more critically than before.<sup>59</sup> Whereas in 1987-88 Lenin’s last proposals had been cited as a way that could have prevented Stalinism, now they were criticized for being short-sighted. Vladimir Soloukhin, quoting extensively from Lenin’s works, concluded that “a group, a handful of people, conquered Russia and immediately introduced a more cruel occupation regime... in order to remain in power.”<sup>60</sup> Historians revised their previous assessments in a more radical direction to judge the Bolshevik leader’s “absolutist class approach” and even Bukharin now came under harsh criticism.<sup>61</sup> Although the new school history syllabus was unambiguously pro-Bolshevik and anti-Stalinist,<sup>62</sup> there is no doubt that students were aware of the fervent debate raging on television and in the

press. Defending Lenin, the historians Bordiugov and Kozlov argued that he should not be blamed “for being a man of his time and not of the present,”<sup>63</sup> a sentence that reveals the extent to which historical discourse had been overwhelmingly modified in less than two years.

Yuri Afanasiev’s opinions underwent another shift, adopting once again the historical trends of the time: “The Soviet regime was brought into being through bloodshed, with the aid of mass murder and crimes against humanity... One must admit that Soviet history as a whole is not fit to serve as a legal basis for Soviet power. By admitting this, we would be taking a step towards the creation of a democratic society.”<sup>64</sup> The historian had become a harsh critic of the October Revolution by declaring, “The party as it is now does not have a future, because it is a Leninist party... it is therefore necessary to renounce all features of the party which come from Lenin.”<sup>65</sup> Three years previously the same historian had given an influential article of his the title, “Talking about the past, we must keep the future of socialism in mind,”<sup>66</sup> showing the radical shift his viewpoint, as well as the viewpoint of the society he was addressing, had been through.

Interest in history did not fade throughout 1989 and 1990 and became focussed in another direction. Debates among Soviet citizens were no longer confined to the leadership’s planned framework, but instead embraced an explosive public critique of Marxism-Leninism. Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago* and Grossman’s *Vse Techet* (Everything Flows), vividly drawing the connection between Stalin and Lenin, were published in 1989 and soon became widely known throughout the Soviet public, while at the same time films like *Protsess* by Igor Belyaev and *Vlast Solovetskaya* by Marina Goldovskaya, or the documentary *Is Stalin With Us?* by T. Shakherdiev (1989) offered a fresh and more thoughtful insight into Soviet history.<sup>67</sup> The press was swamped by articles indicative of this change of historical focus (e.g. the new journal of the Central Committee, *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, published a number of incriminating Leninist documents in its first issue<sup>68</sup>) and popular television programs began having historians, whose statements gradually became more influential than statements made by politicians.<sup>69</sup> Roundtable discussions, conferences, and symposiums on historical issues<sup>70</sup> where Leninism and Marxism were fervently questioned by scholars, also contributed to the dominant concern of the Soviet media, “Had Russia been on the wrong path ever since 1917?”<sup>71</sup>

While Leninism, Bolshevism, and Marxism were on trial by historians such as Tsipko, Soloukhin, and Khanin, who represented a liberal anti-Leninist trend, the predominant argument against this “doctrinal” explanation of Stalinism was no longer Gorbachev’s position. Towards the end of 1989, some scholars began to state that the origins of Stalinism rested on long-standing patterns in Russian history, such as the low level of political culture, the legacy of serfdom, bureaucracy, and Russia’s Eastern heritage.<sup>72</sup> In *Vse Techet* Grossman maintains this stance and adds that “slavish subordination of the individual to the state and its master accompanied the thousand-year history of the Russians.” Historical revisionism, then, was increasingly fragmenting into diverse trends; the discussion about Stalinism was subsumed into a larger debate about Russia’s past and future, about meaning and causality in its history.



The official framework of historical revisionism set by the politburo could not accommodate or support debates that could cast doubts on ideological values. In November 1989 Gorbachev observed that “in the name of the ‘great objective’ any means, of the most inhuman kind, were justified,”<sup>73</sup> although he was now following a trend in history instead of creating it. Still, from 1988 to 1990 reconsideration of the past remained crucial for governmental moves. “Hardly a day passed without a major article rehabilitating some figure erased from the history books”<sup>74</sup> and, as a result, the Party had restored the names of up to two million citizens by March 1990. In addition to rehabilitations, the Kremlin, running to keep up with public opinion, dealt with two hotly debated issues during *perestroika*, first condemning the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Treaty of 1939 and then accepting responsibility for the massacre in Katyn.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, publication of some of Trotsky’s writings<sup>76</sup> and several articles about him<sup>77</sup> met with the politburo’s reluctance to rehabilitate this controversial figure and a demonstration on behalf of the victims of Stalinism in Minsk in 1988 was violently dispersed by the police.<sup>78</sup> The politburo could not handle the campaign it had unleashed, for the debate about the past was breaking away from party policy. Throughout 1990 Gorbachev kept reassuring that there was no continuity between Stalin and Lenin and that the Leninist heritage was still quintessential: “The true Lenin is surprisingly up-to-date; don’t believe those who claim the opposite.”<sup>79</sup>

However, the Central Committee plenum of 5-7 February 1990 agreed to modify Article 6 and remove the CPSU’s constitutional monopoly on political power, a decision officially confirmed on 14 March. This was the end of Leninist one-party rule, established in October 1917.

Above is a brief description of the fervor about reassessing Soviet history that dominated Soviet life since the launch of *perestroika* until March 1990, as seen in the politburo’s statements and actions, in historical scholarship, and in public life. Albeit selective and with omissions, this survey has shown that before 1988 historical discussions were conditioned mostly by *publitsisty*, revolved around Stalinism, and thrived on sensational revelations. After 1988, with the involvement of historians, the focus progressively shifted from the 1927-28 period (abolition of NEP) to 1921-23, and, finally, to Lenin himself, becoming transformed into a philosophical conflict over the fate of communism in Russia. It is not suggested, however, that just a handful of articles altered the revision of history in people’s minds and lives. This fascination with history developed together with a nascent civil society and a general economic and political crisis that affected its course as well as being influenced by it. In less than three years, politicians and citizens revised their history, completely overturning its core myths, a phenomenon that is unlikely to be found in any other place or time. Finding the reasons behind these radical modifications in thought seems to be an interesting challenge.

### ***B. Why Was History so Intensively Rewritten Under Gorbachev?***

The discussion about Stalinism that Gorbachev officially endorsed in 1987 became such a popular issue that it could not be limited to the specific causes and consequences of Stalinism. By 1990 the discussion was questioning the entire course of Russian and Soviet history. To portray this schematically, in 1986 Stalin was still, at least officially, the good continuation of a good cause, the cause of Lenin. Then Stalin became the wretched continuation of a humane policy. Later it was shown that this plan was directed by the equally wicked Lenin. At the end, even the socialist cause turned out to be mistaken. In 1990 the sources of communist failure could even be traced to Russian culture and history. In order to illuminate the rationalization behind the changes that the rewriting of history underwent during *perestroika*, we should first try to trace the forces behind this evolution in thought.

To begin with, the structural components of the subject under discussion determined its evolution; that is to say, Stalinism cannot be fully discussed without alluding to its doctrinal sources or the regime from which it emerged, since Marxism-Leninism stands for an overshadowing ideology that eradicated in Soviet Russia all possible alternatives to achieve its goals and establish its own almost mythical reality and deterministic notion of time. For the same reason Stalinism cannot be fully comprehended if it is isolated from the history and culture of the Russian people who endured and implemented such a different reality under Bolshevik rule. Therefore, the very nature of the subject resulted in the connection between Stalinism, Leninism, Marxism, and Russian history. Moreover, the Soviet journalists and intellectuals who, at least at the beginning, spurred the debate were conscious of this interaction because of their familiarity with banned Western publications<sup>80</sup> and *samizdat* ("self-publishing" and privately distributed illegal underground manuscripts). Therefore, when Gorbachev launched a reassessment of Soviet history, along with a reduction in the power of censorship and significant liberalization of public debate, this connection came to the fore.

These are, briefly, some of the reasons why Soviet historical discussion underwent these shifts in focus. However, the question, "Why was history so altered throughout *perestroika*?" cannot be lucidly answered by this type of explanation, for behind the character and evolution of these debates lies the general role history played during these years. As is evident from the above, the actual modifications in rewriting history were inextricably linked with and the result of the passionate interest the Soviet people have in their past. Between 1987 and 1990, history was an extremely contentious issue, its rediscovery an all-consuming matter that gradually became a battleground for conflicting ideological and political concerns. All these factors resulted in widespread conversion to historical revisionism. Therefore, as a means of explaining why history was so quickly rewritten, an attempt will be made here to explain why history was so important during *perestroika*.

It seems most helpful to divide the many factors contributing to an answer for this question into two broad categories, one concerned with the conditions that have surfaced because of *perestroika* and the other concerned with conditions inherent in Soviet society.

## 1. Politicization of Stalinism and History During Perestroika

### 1.1 From Above

From the very beginning, the politicization of Stalinism was a prominent feature of the Soviet debates, whether the debates were sparked off by Gorbachev or determined by his policies. Increasingly aware that *perestroika* was blocked by the destabilizing powers of the politburo and opposition from unshakable interest groups, Gorbachev decided to harness the “energy of history” to his reforms. An anti-Stalinist agenda would include selective official revelations, reinterpretations, and rehabilitations, and would thereby dethrone Stalinist orthodoxy while mythologizing the Leninist heritage. “Turning to Lenin has greatly stimulated the Party and society in their search to find explanations and answers to the questions that have arisen,”<sup>81</sup> proclaimed the Soviet leader. Historical revisionism, then, was expected to legitimize a new model of socialism exalting the NEP’s mixed economy without, at the same time, endangering the symbols and myths of the system’s legitimacy.<sup>82</sup> Through the selective flow of information, the politburo was seeking to “assign responsibility for past disasters and present problems to the scapegoat Stalin.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, since it was the basis for constructing a “law-governed state,” historical *glasnost* would encourage discussions and activate the human factor in order to attract support from the intelligentsia and the masses while promoting some liberalization and a “socialist” pluralism of views. History, then, was expected to bolster Gorbachev’s reformist goals. As time passed, however, history became radicalized, as did some of his close associates, such as Yakovlev<sup>84</sup> or Afanasiev. In addition, even the Communist Party was gradually undergoing an evolving factionalism, largely evident in the conflicting views about the Soviet past expressed by its members.<sup>85</sup> As a result, the socialist leader had to meet the challenges raised by his own campaign if he wanted to maintain cohesion within the ruling elite and political stability. Actually, it was Marx who had recognized that “the will to power is crucial to elite cohesion” and that this will depends upon “the efforts of the elite to justify to itself its privileged access to power.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, the Soviet leader yielded the right to challenge the Leninist roots of Stalinism and the whole course of the Soviet Union to the public forum by admitting the validity of the question, “Why did Stalin succeed in foisting on the Party and on the whole of society his program and methods? This is the question of questions for evaluating our history...”<sup>87</sup>

Both the call for historical revisionism in Soviet life and its central role in everyday discourse was raised in public from above. The leadership attempted to modernize the foundations and tenets of the Soviet system in order to present them as new sources of authority adjusted to the present needs of reform, and in so doing converted history into a protagonist of *perestroika*. “Knowledge of history, of the cause of particular phenomena, causes that lie at the basis of the huge achievements of our state, and knowledge of the causes of major errors, and the tragic events of

our history – all this will allow us to draw lessons for the present day, when we want to renew society, to disclose more fully the potential of socialism.”<sup>88</sup>

Gorbachev called for a resuscitation of the memory of Soviet citizens, and this was turned into a political battlefield. At the twentieth party congress, Khrushchev “claimed initiative as the prime spokesman for the future by means of seizing title to the past”<sup>89</sup> and eradicating Stalin’s theoretical and historical supremacy. It is no coincidence that during the post-’56 period history was similarly politicized in order to serve the Soviet leader’s reform. In every transformation movement radical changes generate an urgent need to review the past in order to decipher the present, resulting in every reform being based on an interrelation between the old and the new.<sup>90</sup> Each reform movement needs to locate in the past some “golden period” to whose principles or values it aims to return. For both the thaw of the ’60s and *perestroika* of the late ’80s it was the Stalin era that distorted the essence of Leninist true socialism, while Gorbachev posited the “before the fall” period in 1921-1928 as the age of human socialism.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, when it comes to an authoritarian regime like the USSR for which history is one of the primary sources of legitimization, the role of the past is further accentuated and reformers required to present a vision of the past that would offset criticism of the authority they cherish.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, it is more than expected that during a “restructuring period” when political reformers call for a re-elaboration of past experiences that would produce meanings and create new political visions, history comes to reign over every sphere of life.

## 1.2 From Below

### *During Perestroika*

Nevertheless, politicization of Stalinism surfaced as well because of the wide-ranging effect of Stalinist rule on the life of virtually every citizen in the USSR; the pervasiveness of this effect in politics, ethics, personal fate, and everyday life, had converted Stalin into a “quintessentially emotional subject.”<sup>93</sup> Gorbachev, therefore, expected that raising such a broadly appealing issue would restore trust between the party and the average citizen, so he extended *glasnost* to the public at large.<sup>94</sup> He launched “socialist pluralism” which, although tentative, was the first step towards public participation in politics: “We should now rely on the active participation of the population in the implementation of the reforms... on democratization.”<sup>95</sup> For a people, however, whose memory of the past had endured only within intimate circles, this liberalization was equal to lifting the taboo on its public expression and mutual acknowledgment and was, therefore, emancipating.

To be more precise, it seems that the entrance of public opinion into the discussion significantly extended the limits of historical revisionism and thereby irreparably overturned the leadership’s agenda for a controlled criticism of Stalin. Before 1986 people in Soviet Russia were quite unaccustomed to thinking critically and independently about politics, and state hostility toward autonomous groups had resulted in the avoidance of politics and the atomization of society.

Protest, however, required that this political attitude and consciousness<sup>96</sup> be transformed by means of a core concern that would elicit strong responses and operate as a platform for unofficial discourses. For this reason, in the absence of developed alternative ideologies, anti-Stalinism became “the link to free speech.”<sup>97</sup> Anti-Stalinism had broad political, institutional, and moral ramifications. Repudiation of the past became the Soviet people’s passport toward a civil society and collective action, as can be seen in the activities of the Memorial Society and in the declarations made by *Demokraticeskii Soyuz* (Democratic Union).<sup>98</sup> Stalinism came to symbolize all that was wrong with the system and, as a result, became a basis for attempts to defend or modify it, both politically and socially.

History, then, became a powerful medium for the forces arising “from below” into the public forum in increasing numbers. Liberalization encouraged the emergence of different memories brought to light by various groups aligned with different ideological and political currents. These groups began debating the interpretation of their memories, for they were seeking metaphors for their visions of the future in the past. The politburo was the first to reproach Stalin for any existing problems and to uphold the interrupted NEP as a viable symbol for the current *perestroika* in Soviet society, claiming that “the speed of transition to NEP” revealed both the possibility of “carrying out revolutionary changes from above within months” and “the astonishing speed with which these changes can in turn transform economic performance.”<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, people who objected to the Communist Party monopoly and questioned the legitimacy of Soviet rule soon discovered a method of opposition in demonstrating the link between Stalinism and Marxism-Leninism. Some suggested that Western-type democratization should replace it, since “the last chance for solutions was lost at the beginning of the ’20s, and even then it was small,”<sup>100</sup> implying at the same time that a capitalist economy could have been successful, while others preferred to highlight revived notions of Russian history. Alexandr Tsipko claimed that the renewal of Soviet society was impossible “without a return to traditional Russian values and Christianity.”<sup>101</sup> As anti-Leninist views became increasingly popular, vocal criticism of Lenin acquired the status of political correctness and was used by some people to enhance their social status. Concrete political visions of the future had not been shaped and labeled until 1990; however, every tendency opposing the current situation was expressing the need for alternatives to the present by rejecting past patterns.

### *Since the 1960s*

At this point, however, it should be pointed out that this politicization of history in accordance with political interests that emerged during *perestroika* actually reflected an evolution of critical intellectual thought that had begun far earlier. During Khrushchev’s time, especially from 1962–66, a growing number of citizens began questioning Stalinism and the “cult of personality.” This intellectual reawakening was officially interrupted during the period of stagnation that came as a result of Brezhnev’s retreat from reform, but the stagnation further politicized critics of the regime, as the abundance of underground *samizdat* publications circulating since the mid-’60s attests.<sup>102</sup>

Debates, although expressed in “Aesopian terms,” began to develop about the nature of Leninism and socialism, as well as about Russia’s fate and identity.<sup>103</sup> Additional intellectual changes were stimulated by social changes, as the massive explosion of higher education that converted the Soviet people into an urban society, the rapidly rising standard of living under Brezhnev, and Western influences of every kind.<sup>104</sup> Much of the historical debates of the late ’80s derive from the ’60s and ’70s, so the most symbolic artistic works of *perestroika* are not, in fact, products of *glasnost*. Rybakov wrote his epic novel in the 1960s when *Gulag Archipelago* was also written and *Repentance* was produced in 1982. Between the two attempts for reform, individual journals such as *Novyi Mir*,<sup>105</sup> theatres, cinemas, and literature, while trying to critically preserve memory, functioned as islands of non-conformity. The dissident movement nascent during these years debated the interpretation of Soviet history and, for that reason, was inextricably linked to anti-Stalinism.<sup>106</sup>

Evidence about the resuscitation of historical memory during the years before *perestroika* is indirectly provided in the efforts to preserve the national heritage and the natural environment. Mass support for the All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Cultural and Historical Monuments (VOOPIK), founded in 1966, as well as for major environmental campaigns mounted against industrial development, indicates public opposition to demolishing ancient monuments and historical sites.<sup>107</sup> In publicly attacking a river project in Siberia, the poet Andrei Voznesenskii referred to the “ecology of culture” and said, “Our indifference destroys the past, it destroys the present... And what is worse, we are destroying the future!”<sup>108</sup> In addition to showing public interest in preserving links to its past, these actions sowed the seeds of civic action and criticism of authority in the guise of non-political issues. VOOPIK, for example, is called “the first example of a public movement.”<sup>109</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, novels by Trifonov, symphonies by Shostakovich, songs by Vysockij, and the *samizdat Pamyat*, together with the works and events mentioned above, had been clandestinely or allegorically debating history. “Where memory becomes slender, culture... becomes poor and ethics weak... from politics to everyday life,” the editors of *Pamyat* noted already in 1976.<sup>110</sup> Much of what the state mythology had presented as the source of motivation and unity for Soviet society was gradually fading. *Glasnost*, therefore, did not mean the transition from ignorance and silence to revelation and truth,<sup>111</sup> but the transition from private to public debate, from oral to written discourse. History had begun to grow in importance long before the launch of *perestroika*, for the struggle to remember had been converted into a form of opposition.<sup>112</sup>

## 2. Patterns Intrinsic to Soviet Thought

Until this point, historical fervor under Gorbachev has been ascribed to the leadership’s agenda and the gradual public liberalization that resulted in a sweeping politicization of scholarship. Nevertheless, the scope and evolution of this historical discussion into an overarching philosophical



diatribe also arose out of patterns intrinsic to Soviet thought. In any case, the role usually attributed to history and its relation to society and memory is to a certain extent a characteristic of occidental thought, whereas dissimilar intellectual traditions resulted in a particular conceptualization of history in Russian and Soviet society.

## 2.1 Pre-revolutionary Beliefs and Practices

To a great extent, Soviet discussions about Stalinism echoed the late nineteenth century. Public interest in history has deep roots in Russian thought; a utilitarian employment of history was promoted by the pro-revolutionary establishment when the tsarist bureaucracy sought to endorse a conventional version of history to reinforce the existing order. The nationalization reforms in the final quarter of the century directed massive attention to the past, and Moscow University was one of the first institutions to have a lively historical community, as early as 1880.<sup>113</sup> Works by prominent historians such as V. Kliuchevsky (1841-1911), S. Soloviev (1820-1879), or even N. Karamzin (1766-1826), were republished and enjoyed great popularity under Gorbachev.<sup>114</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century radical intelligentsia channeled this interest in order to firmly instill the belief that history, indisputably intertwined with politics, economics, and culture, was a guideline for any reasonable worldview (*mirovozzvenie*).<sup>115</sup> As a result, politicization of the past during *glasnost* derived from a much older political culture that accorded history a broad and decisive role in contemporary life.

It is hardly surprising, then that debating major current affairs issues in intellectual life, including art and history, is profoundly embedded in Russian culture. Literature has been the traditional preeminent medium for reflecting on philosophy and commenting on politics. Historical novels, a genre with roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century historicism, has almost alone provided Russian and Soviet intellectuals with a vehicle for examining historical and political issues.<sup>116</sup> Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Bely's *Petersburg*, and Saltykov's *The History of One Town* challenged historical conventions in the same maverick way as did *Children of Arbat*, *New Appointment*, and *Gulag Archipelago*.

Other persistent concerns of the nineteenth century Russian intelligentsia resurfaced as well during *perestroika*, channeling the debate on Stalinism into a broader philosophical speculation over Russia's destiny. Peter Chaadaev's *First Philosophical Letter*, published in 1836, criticizes Russia's backwardness compared to the West and thereby launched an issue of great magnitude for Russian thought,<sup>117</sup> the "Western-Slavophil" debate. In 1989 scholars began wondering if their country's problems stemmed from Marxist ideas that deformed Russia's uniqueness or from the country's own "slavish soul" and reluctance to embrace European civilized values. This concern reemerged,<sup>118</sup> as did the fundamental questions, "Who is to blame?" and "What is to be done?"<sup>119</sup> which became firm points of reference for the Soviet debate and determined its course. Hence, attempts made to enlighten aspects of the Soviet past during *perestroika* partly mirror issues that had been unresolved within Russian/Soviet thought for a long time.

## 2.2 Marxist-Leninist Beliefs and Soviet Practices

No matter how significant nineteenth century patterns of thought may have been, Soviet patterns of thought exerted even greater influence upon the debates under Gorbachev, and the most fundamental was the use to which Marxist-Leninist ideology put history. This claim is not intended to overshadow the fact that history in every society (especially when undergoing reform or turbulence) affects politics, the myths, norms, and beliefs of that society's system. Nonetheless, the political-historical dynamics are uniquely and intensively combined in the Soviet Union and, therefore, have to be emphasized.

From the very beginning, party leaders in the USSR claimed to have mastered the principles of scientific socialism and, subsequently, the objective laws of social evolution, and they grounded their legitimacy on these claims. Under state socialism, then, Marxism-Leninism was not just one ideology or political rule that had been chosen among many, but the "inevitable and glorious outcome of a discernible historical process."<sup>120</sup>

Although Marx produced no historical works, everything he wrote "was impregnated with history."<sup>121</sup> He developed a general coherent theory, the materialist conception of history, which encompasses the whole span of human development and unquestionably retains the Hegelian certainty that historical development is a progressive, linear move. Furthermore, since "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles"<sup>122</sup> for which economics is the cause, economic determinism is quintessential in his theory. Marx, however, offsets economic determinism with revolutionary activity by claiming, "it is men that change history," although "not just as they please... but under circumstances directly transmitted from the past."<sup>123</sup> With Lenin's appearance, this historical determinism becomes activism,<sup>124</sup> and now it is political, not economic factors that move the world; the revolutionary hero and then the party and the leaders produce and control historical events. Under the Bolshevik leader history becomes both politicized and a major didactic instrument.

Stated briefly, both Marx and Lenin considered history as an unchallenged authority and causative power that brings to light the key element of utopianism because it constantly generates the new, the innovative, out of the old and decomposing.<sup>125</sup> Within this context the past is read from the present, since it contains the future, the triumph of socialist revolution, which, according to Marxism-Leninism, is inevitable. History becomes subordinated to a goal defined as its culmination; it becomes teleological and deterministic. All the features attributed to the scholarship by this ideology were deeply embedded in the Soviet people's historical consciousness, as well as on a more subtle level in their way of thinking.

The essential features of history had remained the same since the October Revolution, that is to say, grounded upon Marx and Lenin's beliefs. After the birth of the socialist state, the role of historiography in the Soviet Union became more closely tied to the concern for sustaining political stability and social control. Lenin was conscious of the need to control the collective historical

consciousness and commissioned Nicholas Pokrovsky to reshape Russia's past according to the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>126</sup> Historians, however, had suffered a second purge during the early '30s and Stalin demonstrated that under state socialism history was the prerogative of the Party. His notoriously dogmatic textbook, *Short Course* (published in 1938),<sup>127</sup> was the only sanctioned version of history that molded people's historical perceptions and every publication, film, broadcast, or judgment expressed in public. Historians have always contributed "to the communist education of the working people," since "Marxist-Leninist doctrine places in the researcher's hands the only correct and scientific creative method of objective, comprehensive study of social phenomena and processes."<sup>128</sup> In 1956 "the central committee proceeded from the fact that the party should not be afraid to tell people the truth" and launched a process of de-Stalinization. Nonetheless, history was meant to serve only the prescribed mythology in order to shape collective memory, since Khrushchev believed that: "historians are dangerous people; they are capable of upsetting everything. They must be directed."<sup>129</sup> All the vehicles of authority and any change in policy had to be validated in historical terms, as the growing importance of the Malaya Zemlya battle and Brezhnev's role in it throughout the '70s<sup>130</sup> shows.

Gorbachev's conduct toward history was conditioned by a heritage that attaches a desire for the future to a "science" of the past. During 1985-1990, both the people defending the system and those struggling to discredit it were constantly kneading past events and figures to fit them into the desired future. Throughout *perestroika* the Soviet people conceived themselves, their present, and their future mainly in relation to their history. Gorbachev invoked the memory of Lenin to root his reforms in a respected past, whereas his radical critics celebrated the pre-revolutionary decades that offered foundations for a new society. Many ordinary people, suffering from inflation and uncertainty, often compared their situation to what they remembered as the stability of the Brezhnev years.<sup>131</sup>

So, Soviet historiography, as already described, serves numerous functions in the Soviet political system. It is a didactic tool, an agitator for public opinion, whereas the historian interprets every fact and historical figure according to their usefulness in validating the current power holders. Since scholars have to justify everything as indispensable in the march toward socialism, they rationalize present policies, a mission consciously recognized by the public and encouraged by the political leadership. Gorbachev's words emphasize that, "it is in developing socialism... that we see the meaning of our present-day work and concerns."<sup>132</sup> Past events and personalities had to be continually revised as "new presents" produced "new pasts." The chronicle of Kirov's murder is an eloquent case of the revisionism intrinsic in Soviet scholarship: On December 1, 1934, S. M. Kirov was murdered in Leningrad by a shot from a revolver. *Short Course* tells us, "the murderer turned out to be a member of the counter-revolutionary group... as it later transpired... it was the work of this united Trotsky-Bukharin gang."<sup>133</sup> According to the 1962 *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, "the assassin was full of hatred for the party and its leaders who were firmly implementing the *Leninist* general line... (the murder) was commit-

ted under the personality cult. Stalin seized upon it... it was the beginning of wholesale repressive measures and flagrant violations."<sup>134</sup> Under Gorbachev, archival evidence did not confirm the hypothesis that Kirov's murder was Stalin's responsibility, but Volkogonov, the most reliable historian of the reformist regime, observed, "Knowing what we now know about Stalin, it is certain that he had a hand in it."<sup>135</sup>

Marxism-Leninism and the legacy of its influence upon scholarship influenced more than official policies and statements; it also molded the historical consciousness of the entire Soviet people, cultivating entrenched patterns of thinking even among those opposed to the regime. The debates under Gorbachev still thrived on Marxist analytical tools. Social-economic factors and historical laws of development, expressed in Marxist terms, were stressed more than actual political mechanisms or individual and concrete forces. The Manichean structure of thinking developed by the Soviet propaganda machine was difficult to eradicate, as could be seen in the naïve enthusiasm and sudden admiration for the tsarist period<sup>136</sup> that replaced the earlier hostility. People had simply reversed the binary model of Soviet mythology. This "black and white template" unavoidably resulted in an ambivalent position regarding the past, the so-called "attraction-repulsion syndrome" characteristic of Soviet attitudes towards history.<sup>137</sup> The past is tyrannical and ill-fated, yet represents the passport for the glorious future and, similarly, history is at the same time scientific and mystic, sacred and decadent. Therefore, because of the relative freedom of expression that *glasnost* brought along, the debates during *perestroika* exposed this contradiction with great intensity. Historical memory could not fit into the official framework set by Gorbachev and simultaneously accommodate mass repressions and idealism, fear of the system, and faith to its mission. Marxism-Leninism imparted to history a spiritual and at the same time instrumental use, whose imprint on the minds of the Soviet people conditioned the scope and the nature of the historical debates under Gorbachev.

History is a relative concept, determined by diverse cultural, social, and historical traditions. Also, the character of this historical fervor at the end of the '80s was affected by external factors. There was little access to archival sources, the most critical of which remained out of reach even after restrictions were relaxed in 1987.<sup>138</sup> Historians lacked the major tool for academic research that would have broadened the scope of the debates, which were conditioned, at least initially, by the "sensationalism and lack of professionalism"<sup>139</sup> of *publitsisty*. In addition, historians could not easily come up to *perestroika*'s potential for they had recently undergone serious onslaught from Brezhnev's regime. The legacy of earlier ideological controls, as well as the still existing powers of censorship, are other factors that conditioned the course of this passionate renegotiation of the past. The Soviet state and its practices were deeply ingrained in people's lives, identities, language, dreams, and even resistance. Individuals had developed the habit of "doublethink,"<sup>140</sup> that is, an internal chasm between what one knew and what one was allowed and expected to say. Mechanisms of self-enforced conformity, censorship,<sup>141</sup> and self-deception indispensable within each individual and group for everyday life in the USSR did not fade away as soon as *glasnost*

was announced. At least in part, it seems likely that the intensity of this internalized habit orchestrated the flow of historical information the public could accept and articulate.

In our effort to reveal the reasons behind the major revisions of the Soviet past under Gorbachev, the question was raised as to why history was so important throughout this period. The explanation was divided into two broad categories; the first is concerned with *dynamics that emerged with the launch of perestroika* which led to the surfacing of the second that is concerned with *factors already on the move for many years* in Russian/Soviet thought. Because of the combination of these two categories, history seems to have acquired an even more significant role for the politburo and citizens, who obsessively discussed and reconsidered the country's course. These years were a transitory period for the Soviet Union. The present was in turmoil, the future uncertain, and the past "unpredictable."<sup>142</sup>

### ***C. 1985-1990: History as a Response to the Present and the Present as a Response to History***

By asking, "If *perestroika* had not been launched, would history have been rewritten?" we can detect the central driving force that set off these specific reasons mentioned above and channeled them towards historical revisionism. What still seems to be in doubt is whether or not the political situation that emerged under Gorbachev was the determinative factor behind this historical fervor.

#### **1. Historical Revisionism as a Result of *Perestroika***

A further look into the pattern of explanations suggested above may clarify this question. To sum up, history was employed by the politburo to gain support for planned reforms and much of the public seized the opportunity to use history as a vehicle promoting alternatives to this political agenda. Employing the past to oppose a hostile present had been an unofficial tactic since the '60s. In fact, in addition to the Soviet system (as the implementation of Marxist-Leninist ideology), the tsarist regime granted a central role to history in daily political operations, so this tactic was on firm ground. Russian and Soviet beliefs and practices had assigned a fundamental role to history, a role that came into full play with the launch of *perestroika*. At last the Soviet people were free to examine their past, and this occurred just when their country was undergoing a traumatic period of political and social change.

One reasonable explanation could be that under Gorbachev the leadership and the public used history to respond to liberalization and reform and promote their political visions, social needs, and aspirations, and in doing this they were supported by inherent patterns of thought. Similarly, any abrupt shifts in the rewriting of history appear to have occurred also in response to changes in political goals and in the march of political events.

This view is further supported by the nature of the reform the leadership seemed to encourage. Gorbachev sought to radically reform everything without sacrificing the basic character of socialist rule in its Leninist version; “We would have to make changes outside the traditional confines of the system but not outside the confines of socialism.”<sup>143</sup> Since the fundamental structures of Communist Party rule were not to be weakened, however, then the social and political foundations of the Stalinist era would continue to exist. The ideology and practice of the system that had generated Stalin also had produced Gorbachev, so “the Soviet past was still the Soviet present”<sup>144</sup> during these years and, according to the leadership’s agenda, was to be the Soviet future as well. Stalinism was directly associated with many identity issues being revised at the time and the initially concrete process of de-Stalinization soon came to symbolize the survival of the socialist regime. Within this context, the past could not be conceived as different or examined with detachment because it did not symbolize a remote reality but, instead, what was represented as continuity. As a result, while negotiating the past, the leadership and the public were negotiating the present and, because of the current reformist ambiance, they were even preparing for the future. The major political trends during *perestroika* had made extensive use of past trends as models for the future or, as Mikhail Epstein observed, “during 1989-1990, our future and our past have interchanged their place.”<sup>145</sup> This direct linkage is clearly seen in the Memorial Society’s role as a “guarantee against a return to the old times.”<sup>146</sup> Similarly, it could be said that the *perestroika* agenda prevented both the present and the future from being thought of as being different entities distinct from the past; they were linked parts of a whole. This is to be expected, however, for the concept of historical time within the context of the Soviet system blurs boundaries between past, present, and future.

People turned inward toward their past in response to their present in order to figure out their future. The decisive factor generating the volume, scope, and complexity of the historical debates seems to be their subordination to contemporary political concerns, which served as catalysts for the reemergence of the past. Within this context, the Soviet regime, as an “invented tradition,”<sup>147</sup> used “ancient materials” in a new form in “response to novel purposes” and the entire society seemed to be involved in re-conceiving its past, attempting to create new myths for new circumstances. It could be assumed, therefore, that people in the Soviet Union accepted new accounts of history less because of new historical evidence than because of their “political predisposition.”<sup>148</sup>

Such an explanation, however, resonates with postmodernist historical theories which, seeking to find orientation from change over time and construct meaningful links with the past, emphasize the contemporary orientation of historical writing. Moreover, these theories draw special attention to the interrelation between power, memory, and history, and often conclude that, in its effort to control discontinuity and change, to a large extent power regulates memory and history. Since a thorough examination of postmodernist views on history is not within the scope of the present paper, it will only be mentioned here that Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Richard Rorty,<sup>149</sup> and others,



question the idea of genuine knowledge.<sup>150</sup> History, like memory, seems to be “always constructed in or as a response to the past,”<sup>151</sup> constantly revised to suit new identities.

Albeit more complicated and controversial, nonetheless, within the limited perspective of this essay, the influence of the present upon history as highlighted in postmodern epistemology<sup>152</sup> provides the issue under analysis with a hint of theoretical foundation. A conclusion that might be drawn so far regarding the interrelationship between politics and history under Gorbachev is that the reform proclaimed by the politburo was causative and the fervent concern about history reflexive. As has been pointed out, however, historical revisionism was politically defined not only by politburo members and their opponents, nor was it merely a product of *glasnost*. Forces from below that had been unofficially under way for many years were equally powerful factors promoting the debates led by the *publitsisty* as well as official declarations and decisions. Was this public pressure solely in response to Gorbachev's reforms? Was this historical rewriting dependent merely on political moves?

## 2. *Perestroika* as a Result of the Need for Historical Revisionism

If we follow the same explanatory model as above more attentively and in reverse, another interpretation can lead us to other conclusions. As already observed, because of patterns inherent in Russian/Soviet thought, history was the main, if not the only, point of reference by which Soviet people could define themselves. In addition, through its devastating assaults on religion and pre-revolutionary creeds, the regime had invested everything in faith in the glorious course of Soviet history, thereby attributing moral and ethical values to this history. The writing of history became transformed into a substantive element of Soviet existence, to which people posed questions such as, “Who is to blame?” or “What is to be done?” and expected answers. Every belief, desire, dream, difference, or opposition could be expressed only in terms of the ruling ideology, that is, the ideology of socialist evolution, and in the same terms in historical discourse. Stalinism was much more than merely a historical issue, for it had various social and moral effects that had touched virtually every citizen of the Soviet Union. The effort to re-articulate the past, especially the Stalinist past, was not a minor academic issue in Soviet life, but a pressing moral imperative. It seems niggardly to interpret this historical revisionism, which already was advancing in the 1960s, merely as a vehicle for opposition and a response to the present.

A more thorough examination of public reaction during these years could be revealing. Before *glasnost* the official framework restrained popular accounts of history from being acknowledged. The main opening up of the past in 1987, however, released a multitude of private memories which, once shapeless and powerless, were soon urgently voiced and accepted: “Truly, nothing had been forgotten of what had happened. You cannot forget!” commented a former exile in the pages of *Znamya* telling her story because, as she said, “I feel the desire to express the pain in my heart to someone.”<sup>153</sup> Another reader, referring to *The Children of Arbat*, said that he had been waiting “for a book like this for 40 years,” and added that “there are so many whys that will not

leave us in peace,”<sup>154</sup> implying that the traumatic personal histories needed to be recognized.<sup>155</sup> Perhaps the constant concern with history during these years served as a purgative for Soviet citizens who tormented themselves by asking, “Why didn’t we stop all these negative miscalculations in time? Why were we silent?”<sup>156</sup> Through articles, books, films, and poetry Soviet memory was finally experienced collectively, and it felt, as a viewer of *Repentance* commented, like a “moral purification of society.”<sup>157</sup> The stories that overflowed the public forum throughout *glasnost* often were reminiscent of the traditional function of Soviet history as a tribunal. “We had been waiting for this... social justice is turning into historical justice,” remarked a reader of *Sovetskaia Kultura*, intimating that public articulation of these memories had become an inner duty;<sup>158</sup> “We will remember,” he concluded. In his article, “Unforgiving Memory,” about *Repentance*, V. Lashkin wondered if “We need such a cruel memory of crimes and mistakes,” and evidently his reply is positive, for he described the ethical resonance, and the film, as being concerned not with “sin,” but with “punishment and repentance.”<sup>159</sup> During *glasnost*, history actually served as a means for the Soviet people to repent, as is eloquently illustrated in the film *Repentance*; the heroine Ketī, who embodies popular memory, will not let the past be buried because, she declares, “I have no choice.” Another hero, Tornike, accuses his father of being silent about his grandfather’s crimes and, therefore, of failing to repent. *Perestroika* was even officially defined as a “time for repentance,”<sup>160</sup> and Alexander Yakovlev declared that “when we say that we are rehabilitating someone... we are not forgiving him. We are forgiving ourselves.”<sup>161</sup>

Because the Soviet people had entrusted their identity to history (as told), they had been zealously fighting for their own version of the past long before *perestroika* – albeit in an amorphous and impotent way. The intense activity about historical restructuring under Gorbachev indicates the inherent dynamics and the burden of the Soviet past that impelled people to find a way to assign responsibilities, to cure their traumas, to repent. When *perestroika* offered a chance to articulate the problems otherwise and permitted a change in the historical discourse, a “contra-discourse was developed posing the problem of the participation of society in this history.”<sup>162</sup> On the one hand the above thoughts demonstrate that the pressure for historical rewriting could have resulted in political changes, but on the other, that these political changes could have provoked the resuscitation of memory. It seems that the march of events from 1985-1990 undeniably shaped historical rewriting as much as it was largely conditioned by it.

It is now recognized that “interpretation of the history of the world hinges on a will to transform it”<sup>163</sup> and that the discourse and schemata of our time necessarily condition our access to the past. It is equally valid, therefore, to observe that the rewriting of history during *perestroika* was motivated to a great extent by political circumstances. In 1987, however, the version of the past that people had experienced and that had been suppressed for a long time by official history burst out, revealing its intrinsic impetus and weight. The rationale behind the rediscovery of the past could be comprehended both ways, so it does not seem feasible or justifiable to isolate a single motivation behind this process. Historical revisionism was circuitously linked with contemporary

forces that shaped and sustained it, and with effects it induced as a result of the past and extended it. The catalyst for this polymorphous movement did not rest solely on contemporary circumstances; the unfolding of history writing depended largely on unpredictable combinations and outcomes. The question, “What if *perestroika* had not been launched?” cannot be answered with certainty, nor does it seem any more to be of crucial importance.

### *Conclusion*

In 1917, Lenin wondered, “What our revolution will yield tomorrow – a return to monarchy, a strengthening of the bourgeoisie, a transfer of power to new classes – we don’t know, and nobody knows.”<sup>164</sup> The radical changes in the USSR between 1985 and 1990 were just as unpredictable and surprising, although frequently explained retrospectively through mechanistic patterns. The massive challenge to and restructuring of official Soviet history that began in 1987 was an unforeseen phenomenon that also cannot fully be traced back to its origins, for it arose from the spontaneous combination of the “history of politics” with the “politics of history.” The rewriting of the past was simultaneously a result of and one of the major stimuli for the regime’s progressive loss of legitimacy.

The conclusion that historical revisionism was both a consequence and cause of contemporary political reality was reached through analysis of the rationale behind its emergence. To begin with, the public expression of previously autobiographical memory was initially shaped by an officially sanctioned anti-Stalinist framework, whose structures were synonymous with the structures of the planned reform. The Soviet leadership had always been aware of the urge for control over the diffusion of collective historical consciousness, since it founded its claim to legitimacy on Marxism-Leninism, an ideology that sought justification in a myth of teleological progress.<sup>165</sup> History was transformed into a powerful didactic tool responsible for unifying Marxist theory with Soviet practice and bringing the past into accord with current politics. *Glasnost*, however, loosened the structures on permitted historical discourse and elicited a popular response so powerful that it could not be controlled or channeled. Public demand attracted new voices, new revelations that exposed still more unknown facets of the past, and triggered increasingly fervent enthusiasm for restoring the role of public support and vocalizing personal memories and discontent.

The emotionally and politically charged role of history in Russian/Soviet thought was accentuated by dynamics unleashed from both above and below under Gorbachev. The politburo’s declarations and official moves, non-political organizations and public initiatives, books and articles (republished or current), daily newspapers and journals, films, theatrical plays, and television shows, all were permeated with history for they were openly or indirectly alluding to a rewriting of the past.

Having traced in reverse the present paper’s line of reasoning, it would seem that a conclusion is expected about the nature of history produced from 1985 to 1990. In this short period of time,

popular memories were, indeed, acknowledged and a huge amount of historical facts and figures undeniably revealed. Was that re-appropriation of isolated historical events, however, necessarily equated with a re-appropriation of history in general? In fact, this nascent historical discourse conveys more the impression of being an incomplete mosaic shaped by a *publitsisty* approach and an arbitrary accumulation of diverse versions of the past than of being a solid attempt to gradually erect an increasingly more complete narrative of the past. In *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (1990) this point is further illustrated: "It is already five years now that millions of students... have been waiting for the revised history manuals they were promised. For five years they have been learning [history] (or they have been learning generally nothing at all) through journalistic publications... Our powerful state, thus, will one day find itself questioned by a new generation deprived of its historical memory..."<sup>166</sup> The skepticism seen in this passage is a result of the abrupt and uncertain changes in historical structures that occurred throughout *perestroika*. *Glasnost* could be defined more as a "process" than a condition and the rewriting of the past during *perestroika* corresponds to an ever evolving transition towards a "new way of thinking."<sup>167</sup> It may be quite inappropriate, then, to conclude by condensing all this developing process explored above into a definite judgment about historical revisionism under Gorbachev. Up to 1990 old historical creeds had been de-legitimized but not yet replaced by a definite historical discourse or crystallized version of the past. The only conclusion that can be drawn, then, seems to be that throughout this period a historical issue – the restructuring of the past – burst out with unprecedented intensity and released the thoughts and emotions of the Soviet people. Although this eruption was dependent upon several restraining influences it became a genuine historical force in its own right.

<sup>1</sup> Nina Andreeva, "Ne mogy postupat'siya printsipami" ("I cannot forego my principles"), *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 13, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 3, 1989, also published in Bertram D. Wolfe, *Khrushchev and Stalin's Ghost*, New York, 1957.

<sup>4</sup> This "thaw" was reflected in the publication of articles and books questioning the 1930s, the most famous of which is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, published in 1962.

<sup>5</sup> Fedor Burlatskii, "A political portrait of Khrushchev," *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, no 8, February 4, 1988, cited in Donald Raleigh (ed.), *Soviet Historians and Perestroika, The First Phase*, New York, 1989, p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> For *Perestroika's* first official proclamation, see *Pravda*, 25 April, 1986.

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika, New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, London, 1987, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> *Pravda*, February 26, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. February 14, 1987.

<sup>10</sup> Other politburo members, like Aleksandr Yakovlev, elevated in politburo in July 1987, appeared to hold an even less hesitant approach towards Soviet past, while others, like Ligachev, maintained their conservative attitude.

<sup>11</sup> *Pravda*, February 19, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Gorbachev defended industrialization and collectivization while being critical of Bukharin and Trotsky, in *Pravda*, November 3, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> M. Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> R. W. Davies, "The Politics of Soviet History," in Martin McCauley (ed.), *Gorbachev and Perestroika*, London, 1990, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> For the conference proceedings, see *Pravda*, 29 June to 4 July, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> R. W. Davies, *History in the Gorbachev Revolution*, London, 1989, p.vii.

<sup>17</sup> The actual reform lasted from January 1987 to March 1990 and can be divided into discussion (until the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Conference, summer 1988) and implementation phases, Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, London, 2002, pp. 8-10.

<sup>18</sup> A process controlled first by a party control commission (1985) and afterwards by the Commission on the further examination of materials concerning the repressions of the '30s, '40s, and early '50s (1987).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Sakwa, *Gorbachev and His Reforms*, New York, 2001, p. 96. For an example of the relation between monuments and reform in Soviet society, see Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park, a Monumental Change," in *History and Memory*, vol. 13, no. 2 available at [www.iupjournals.org/history](http://www.iupjournals.org/history) (last visited on 24/08/03)

<sup>20</sup> V. Zhuravlev, cited in Raleigh, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> S. V. Tyutyukhin, *Izvestiia*, May 3, 1987.

<sup>22</sup> *Moskovskie Novosti*, January 11, 1987. Yuri Afanasiev shocked the establishment with his inaugural speech entitled 'The energy of historical knowledge', in *Moscow News*, no. 2, 1987, pp 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> The gradual change in the historical profession is eloquently reflected in the roundtable discussion "Istricheskaiia nauka v usloviakh perestroika" ("Historical Science under conditions of restructuring"), *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 3, 1988, pp. 3-57.

<sup>24</sup> Letter by a student published in *Ogonek*, March 1989, cited in Christopher Cerf and Marina Albee (eds.), *Voices Of Glasnost*, London, 1990, p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> *Izvestiia*, June 10, 1988. For a lengthy discussion on public education until 1988 see William Husband, "Rewriting Soviet history texts: the first phase," in Takayuki Ito, *Facing up to the Past*, Sappong, 1988, pp. 81-94.

<sup>26</sup> *Triumph and Tragedy* is the title of the first honest official biography of Stalin, by Dmitrii Volkogonov, Moscow, 1988.

<sup>27</sup> *Pravda*, February 14, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, November 3, 1987.

<sup>29</sup> For example, see Dmitrii Volkogonov, "Triumf i tragediia," *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, December 9, 1987 and L. Kurin interview, "Leninskoe zaeshchanie," *Pravda*, February 26, 1988.

<sup>30</sup> *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, June 17, 1988.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, July 29, 1987.

<sup>33</sup> Other equally important works concerning Soviet history published during *perestroika* are: Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone* and *Robed in White*, Grossman's *Life and Fate*, Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and Granin's *Zubr*.

<sup>34</sup> Josephine Woll and Denise Youngblood, *Repentance*, London, 2001, p. 2. For more information about *Repentance*, see Denise Youngblood, "Repentance, Stalinist Terror and the Realism of Surrealism," in Robert Rosenstone, *Revisioning History*, London, pp. 139-154.

<sup>35</sup> G. Popov, "S tochki zreniia ekonomista," *Nauka i Zhizn*, 1987, no. 4, pp. 54-65, a review of *New Appointment*, and Igor Klyamkin, "Kakaia ulitsa vedet v khramu," *Novyi Mir*, 1987, no. 11, pp. 150-88, based on *Repentance*.

<sup>36</sup> *Znamya*, no. 5, 1988, cited in Alec Nove, *Glasnost in Action*, London, 1989, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> See *Moscow News*, 1988, no. 10 and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 14 January, no. 4, 1987. *Pravda* publicized an extended series of articles concerning *Dalshe* by politicians (January-February 1988) and *Sovetskaia Rossiia* a similar series by historians (January 28, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Davies, *History in...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika and Soviet Media*, London, 1991, p. 59 For an analytical table of the print runs of newspapers and periodicals, see R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, London, 1997, p. 221.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, articles concerning revelations about the Gulag camp system in *Izvestiya*, 4-6 August, 1988, or about army commanders purged after WW II, in *Ogonek*, no. 26, June 1987, the memoirs of Bukharin's wife in *Ogonek*, no. 48, 1987, or the letters of the exiled revolutionary hero Raskolnikov published in *Ogonek*, no. 26, June 1987.

<sup>41</sup> Many of these letters appear in Vitaly Korotich and Cathy Porta (eds.), *The Best of Ogonek, The New Journalism of Glasnost*, London, 1990 and in Cerf and Albee, *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Such as the Club for Social Initiatives (KSI), or the *Klub Perestroika*, in Vyacheslav Igrunov, "Public Movements: from protest to political self-consciousness," cited in Kathleen Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims*, USA, 1996, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Holquist, "Constructing a new past, the Soviet experience in post-soviet historiography," paper presented at the Conference "Russia at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Culture and its Horizons in Politics and Society", p. 20, available at [www.stanford.edu/group/Russia20](http://www.stanford.edu/group/Russia20) (last visited on 23/08/03)

<sup>44</sup> The student Dimitri Yurasov compiled a card file consisting of 13,000 entries with names and information about victims. Many citizens followed Aleksandr Michakov's struggle to uncover secret burial sites. See David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, London 1993, pp. 30-35 and 137-140.

<sup>45</sup> Even though it was no longer easy to distinguish between officially sanctioned and dissident literature.



<sup>46</sup> There were roughly 120 Russian provincial organizations. See Anne White, "The Memorial Society in the Russian Provinces," in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 47, no. 8, 1995, p. 1343.

<sup>47</sup> Andrei Sakharov, Anatoly Rybakov, Yuri Afanasiev and Boris Yeltsin, among others, supported the Memorial Society. For an analytical account of the Memorial Society's history, see Kathleen Smith, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> Cited on the *Memorial Society's* official site, available at [www.memo.ru](http://www.memo.ru) (last visited on 5/08/03).

<sup>49</sup> For more information about the Week of Conscience, see Adam Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost*, London, 1994, pp. 115-118.

<sup>50</sup> The Memorial Society maintained this character after overcoming persistent internal divisions concerning the movement's politicization. See Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>51</sup> Vera Tkanchenko, *Pravda*, August 21, 1987.

<sup>52</sup> Moskovskie Novosti, 1988, no. 45. Andreeva's letter mentioned at the beginning of this paper is considered to be the cornerstone of this position.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-100.

<sup>54</sup> See above, footnote 15.

<sup>55</sup> Argumenty i Fakty suggested that 40 million people had suffered under Stalin (February 4, 1989), while Roy Medvedev estimated the number to be up to 38 million, Moskovskie Novosti, November 23, 1988, evaluations that did not go unopposed, Sakwa, Gorbachev..., *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>56</sup> Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev...*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>57</sup> Vasily Seliunin, "Istoki," *Novyi Mir*, 1988, no. 5, pp. 162-189.

<sup>58</sup> Aleksandr Tsipko, "Istoki Stalinizma," *Nauka i Zhizn*, 1988, no. 11, pp. 45-55, 1988, no. 12, pp. 40-48, 1989, no. 1, pp. 46-56, 1989, no. 2, pp. 53-61. For English translations, see A. Tsipko, "The roots of Stalinism" in Alexander Dallin and Bertrand Patenaude (eds.), *Stalin and Stalinism*, London, 1992, pp. 373-390.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Grigorii Khanin, *Rodina*, no. 7, 1989, pp. 80-84, cited in R. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, Birmingham, 1997, p. 9, or Aleksey Kiva, "Krizis 'zhanra,'" *Novyi Mir*, 1990, 3, pp. 206-216.

<sup>60</sup> *Rodina*, no. 10, 1989, pp. 66-70.

<sup>61</sup> See V. Kozlov and G. Bordiugov, "Povorot 1929 goda i alternativa Bukharina" and comments by Kolesnikov, Aksenov, and Kulikova in "Stalinskaia model sotzializma," in *Voprosy Istorii KPSS*, no. 8, 1988, pp. 21-22 and no.12, 1990, pp. 40-43.

<sup>62</sup> R. W. Davies, "History and Perestroika," in E. Rees (ed.), *The Soviet Communist Party in Disarray*, London, 1992, p. 131.

<sup>63</sup> G. Bordiugov and V. Kozlov, "Lichnost, doctrina, vlast," *Kommunist*, no. 5, 1990, pp. 75-76.

<sup>64</sup> Sovetskaya Moldaviya, cited in *Radio Liberty: Report on the USSR*, no. 30, July 28, 1989.

<sup>65</sup> Cited by G. L. Smirnov in *Pravda*, February 1, 1990.

<sup>66</sup> *Moscow News*, May 10, 1987, pp. 11-13.

<sup>67</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kino Glasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Times*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 144.

<sup>68</sup> For more information on this journal and its first issue, see *Radio Liberty: Report on the USSR*, no.11, 17 March, 1989, pp. 1-6.

<sup>69</sup> Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> For example, a conference devoted to Bukharin on September 30, 1988, two conferences on civil war in October 1989 and April 1990, and the symposium "Great October and Perestroika" in June 1989.

<sup>71</sup> Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>72</sup> See Viktor Krivortov, "Ruskii put," *Znamya*, 1990, no. 8, pp. 140-164 and papers by V. Lapkin, B. Oreshin, L. Sedov, in Kh. Kobo (ed.), *Osmyslit Kult Stalina*, Moskva, 1990 as well as D. Olshanskii "Sotsialnaya psikhologiiia vintikov", *Voprosy Filosofii*, no. 8, 1989, pp. 81-103.

<sup>73</sup> *Pravda*, November 26, 1989.

<sup>74</sup> Scott Shane, *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union*, Chicago, 1994, p. 126.

<sup>75</sup> Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>76</sup> Such as the essay *New Course* or the book *The Stalin School of Falsification*.

<sup>77</sup> See *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 7, 8, 9, 1989.

<sup>78</sup> It was feared that the protest would develop into a Belorussian nationalistic demonstration, Christopher Cerf and Albee, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>79</sup> *Pravda*, 11 March 1990.

<sup>80</sup> Such as interpretations of Soviet history by Leonard Shapiro, Richard Pipes, Robert Tucker, Antonio Gramsci, Leon Trotsky, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Roy Medvedev, and Nikolai Berdiaev.

<sup>81</sup> M. Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, p. 25

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Sherlock, *The Politics of the Past in Russia: Historical Discourse During Reform, Revolution and Restoration*, p. 2, available at [www.rinri.org/K-Carnegie/4sherlock.pdf](http://www.rinri.org/K-Carnegie/4sherlock.pdf) (last visited on 24/08/03).

<sup>83</sup> Robert Fynes, "Some perspectives on the Soviet ferment concerning Soviet history," in Takayuki Ito (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>84</sup> Alexandr Yakovlev (footnote 10) is believed to have had a great influence in the media and have played a role in the publication of provocative articles such as those by Tsipko.

<sup>85</sup> For example, the two unofficial platforms for the 28<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the Marxist and the Democratic, already six months before its proceedings, were divided on the grounds of their approach to the past, *Pravda*, March 11, 1990.

<sup>86</sup> On this point see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, London, 1979, part 1, in Thomas Sherlock, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> M. Gorbachev, "The Socialist idea and Revolutionary Perestroika," *Pravda*, 26 November, 1989.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Nancy Heer, *Politics and History in Soviet Russia*, London, 1971, p. 61.

<sup>90</sup> Nurit Schleifman (ed.), *Russia at the Crossroads: History, Memory and Political Practices*, London, 1998, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and the Fall of the Cult of WW II in Russia*, New York, 1994, p. 169.

<sup>92</sup> Alter Litvin (ed.), *Writing History in Twentieth Century Russia*, New York, 2001, p. 18.

<sup>93</sup> Alexander Dallin "Soviet History," in Alexander Dallin and Bertrand Patenaude (ed.), *Soviet Scholarship under Gorbachev*, Stanford, 1988, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Strayer, *Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change*, New York, 1998, p. 99.

<sup>95</sup> M. Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>96</sup> Kathleen Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>98</sup> The Memorial Society quickly broadened its agenda to include mobilization of the public to demand political accountability, whereas for DS rejection of past repressions was only “a means of attracting adherents to its goal of destroying the one-party system,” Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>99</sup> Vasilii Seluinin in *Novyi Mir*, no. 5, 1988, p. 172.

<sup>100</sup> Grigorri Khanin, *Rodina*, no. 7, 1989, pp. 80-84.

<sup>101</sup> Tsipko made this statement at a Paris colloquium in February 1990 cited in *Radio Liberty: Report on the USSR*, 2, 23, June 8, 1990, pp. 4-5.

<sup>102</sup> For more information on “samizdat” see Joseph Rubenstein, *Soviet Dissidents: Their Struggle for Human Rights*, Boston, 1980 and Peter Reddaway (ed.), *Uncensored Russia, Protest and Dissent in the USSR*, New York, 1972.

<sup>103</sup> For an analysis of Russian intellectual thought since 1968, see Boris Kagarlitsky, *Message from Moscow by an Observer*, New York, 1971, pp. 289-352.

<sup>104</sup> Takayuki Ito, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Novyi Mir* under Tvardovskii acted as a forum for the publication of works challenging the past, in Dina Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR, Novyi Mir and the Soviet Regime*, New York, 1982, p. 148.

<sup>106</sup> Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights*, Middletown, 1985, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, “Memory in a Totalitarian Society,” in Thomas Butler (ed.), *Memory. History, Culture and the Mind*, London, 1988, p. 129.

<sup>108</sup> At the 8<sup>th</sup> Writers’ Union Congress, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, July 2, 1986, p. 7.

<sup>109</sup> Nurit Schleifman (ed.), *Russia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> This historical *samizdat* is not related with the nationalist group *Pamyat* and has been published in the West by Khronika Press under the title: *Pamyat: istoritseskii sbornik*.

<sup>111</sup> We do not mean to undermine the significance of the revelations concerning the exact facts and figures during *perestroika*, just to highlight a certain continuity in thought since the 1960s, in Veronique Garros, “Dans l’ ex-USSR: de la difficulté d’écrire l’histoire,” in *Annales*, no 47, July-October 1992, p. 990.

<sup>112</sup> Kathleen Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>113</sup> Robert Byrnes, “Some perspectives on the Soviet fervent concerning history,” in Takayuki Ito, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> Alter Litvin, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>115</sup> Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service (eds.), *Reinterpreting Russia*, London, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> Lewis Siegelbaum, “Historical Revisionism in the USSR,” in *Radical History Review*, no. 44, 1989, p. 34.

<sup>117</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, New York, 1981, p. 154.

<sup>118</sup> As evident from letters signed by numerous nationalist intellectuals complaining about Russia being accused of having an “enserfed spirit,” in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, August 4, 1989, and *Literaturnaya Rossiia*, March 2, 1990, translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 41, 52, 1989 and 42, 19, 1990.

<sup>119</sup> Nikolay Chernyshevsky’s novel *Chto delat* (What is to be done?) was written in 1863 and is thought to be the most popular book of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Lenin wrote his homonymous work in 1902.

<sup>120</sup> Rubie Watson (ed.), *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism*, Santa Fe, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, London, 1990, p. 158.

<sup>122</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in L. S. Feuer (ed.), *Basic Political Writings on Politics and Philosophy by Marx and Engels*, Garden City, 1959, p. 20.

- <sup>123</sup> Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Feuer, *op. cit.*, p. 320.
- <sup>124</sup> Heer, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.
- <sup>126</sup> Alter Litvin, *op. cit.*, p. 7. On Bolshevik historians, see John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis, 1928-1932*, London, 1981.
- <sup>127</sup> KPSS, *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course*, Toronto, 1939.
- <sup>128</sup> Editorial, "Soviet Historical Science at a New Stage of Development," *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 8, 1960 quoted in Heer, *op. cit.*, p. 1
- <sup>129</sup> N. Khrushchev, 1956, cited in *ibid.*, p. 11.
- <sup>130</sup> In 1978 a short memoir of the battle was published, *Malaya Zemlya*, by Brezhnev glorifying its writer's exploits. For an interesting critique expressed during *perestroika* by a war veteran, see Cerf and Albee, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-267.
- <sup>131</sup> Strayer, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
- <sup>132</sup> *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, November 4, 1987.
- <sup>133</sup> KPSS, *Short Course, op. cit.*, pp. 325-327.
- <sup>134</sup> KPSS, *History of the Communist Party*, 1962, pp. 486-87.
- <sup>135</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin, Triumph and Tragedy*, London, 1991 (published in USSR in 1989).
- <sup>136</sup> See chapter titled "Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution" in Davies, *Soviet history in the Gorbachev...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-26.
- <sup>137</sup> Heer, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
- <sup>138</sup> Stalin's personal archive and politburo and KGB documents remained off-limits for historians, the only exception being Dmitrii Volkogonov for his biography on Stalin.
- <sup>139</sup> Pavel Volobuev, *Voprosy Istorii KPSS*, cited in McKinnon Elaine, "The Politics of history and historical revisionism: De-Stalinization and the search for identity in Gorbachev's Russia, 1985-1991," *The History Teacher*, vol. 31, no. 2, August, 1998, pp. 162.
- <sup>140</sup> Stephen Kotkin, "The state, is it with us?" In *Russian Review*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2000, p. 43.
- <sup>141</sup> See Freud's metaphor for the censor inside each individual (distinction of public and private censor), cited in Burke, *History as Social Memory*, p. 109, or Solzhenitsyn's observation that "the lie has been incorporated in the system as the vital link holding everything together" quoted in Timur Kuran, "Now out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989, *World Politics*, October 1991, p. 26.
- <sup>142</sup> According to an Armenian anecdote, the future is already known, the past is what keeps changing in Soviet life, cited in Geoffrey Hosking, *Memory in...*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
- <sup>143</sup> *Pravda*, September 25, 1988.
- <sup>144</sup> Richard Sakwa, *Gorbachev...*, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- <sup>145</sup> Mikhail Epstein, "After the future: on the new consciousness in literature, Perestroika: perspectives on modernization," in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, spring 1991, vol. 90, no. 2, p. 409, cited in Garros, *op. cit.*, p. 1001.
- <sup>146</sup> Yuri Afanasiev in *Sovetskii Tsirk* quoted in Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 103. The shared sense of a predictable collective future conferred further significance on the actual collective past, as Steven Knapp remarks in Nathalie Zemon-Davis & Randolph Starn, introduction to the issue on "Memory and Counter Memory," *Representations*, Spring 1989, no 26, p. 5.

<sup>147</sup> According to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger an invented tradition is “a set of practices... which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms” implying “continuity with the past,” thereby turning history into “a legitimator for action and cement for group cohesion,” in *Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 4, 15.

<sup>148</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *op. cit.*, p. 38. The historian also observes that “it is perspective, not archives that are determinative” in the writing of history.

<sup>149</sup> Michel Foucault, the radical spokesman of this trend who does not separate philosophy from history, claims that history is “a set of prohibitive boundaries through which power finds articulation,” or “fiction with special power,” mainly in *Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London, 1970 and *Power and Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*, Sussex, 1980. Hayden White detects the literary conventions of historical narratives in the much-discussed *Metahistory*, Baltimore, 1987, and Richard Rorty observes that history, albeit imposing homogeneity, is also used to legitimate novel situations, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, London, 1980. For a solid presentation of postmodernist theories on history, see Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader*, London, 1997.

<sup>150</sup> Michael Roth, *The Ironist's Cage, Memory, Trauma and the Construction of History*, New York, 1995, p. 5.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>152</sup> Largely based on a famous phrase by Benedetto Croce, “all history is contemporary history,” cited in Jacques le Goff, *History and Memory*, Oxford, 1992, p. 107.

<sup>153</sup> M. A. Kytmanova, *Znamy*, no8, 1987, quoted in Andrei Melville and Gail Lapidus (eds.), *The Glasnost Papers: Voices on Reform from Moscow*, Oxford, 1990, p. 165.

<sup>154</sup> P. Nikitenko, *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>155</sup> “A precondition of the emergence of collective memory is the expression and mutual recognition of shared experience,” Nick Baron, “Perestroika, Politicians and Pandora's Box” in *European Review of History*, Spring 1997, vol. 4, no1, p. 3, available [www.ejournals.ebsco.com](http://www.ejournals.ebsco.com) (last visited at 24/08/03). Moreover, the establishing of a “we-group” can operate as “a source of comfort and defense” and help people work through the traumas of their past, in Michael Roth, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-185.

<sup>156</sup> I. Khudinko, *Moskovskie Novosti*, May 5, 1987.

<sup>157</sup> G. Kapralov. ‘Ottorzhenie zla’, *Pravda*, February 7, 1987.

<sup>158</sup> Pierre Nora claims when a story has no other history than its own memory (when to be X is to remember that one is such), then the psychologization of memory gives the individual the sense that his salvation depends on the repayment of a debt and memory becomes a duty, in ‘*Between Memory and Identity, les lieux de memoire*’, in Zemon-Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>159</sup> *Moskovskie Novosti*, November 30, 1986.

<sup>160</sup> Veronique Garros, *op. cit.*, p. 990, the theme of repentance in perestroika was also included in the preparatory debates for the 28<sup>th</sup> CPSS congress, *Pravda*, August 4, 1990.

<sup>161</sup> *Pravda*, June 6, 1990 cited in Davies, *History and Perestroika*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>162</sup> Thomas Sherlock, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>163</sup> Jacques le Goff, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in Donald Raleigh (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas Sherlock, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>166</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 20, 1990, cited in Garros, *op. cit.*, p. 992.

<sup>167</sup> As Gorbachev himself called for, in *Perestroika...*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.